

I'm Alive

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(Twenty or more people are gathered in a room that's been arranged to accommodate them. There are chairs of different description set in a circle or semi-circle. There are more people than will speak. Those who don't speak are active listeners. What they all have in common is not obvious. They are members of this group only because they have chosen to be. The people may come and go from the kitchen, where there is coffee, tea, soda, cheese and crackers, cookies, etc. After a few minutes, the group forms their circle. They sit, and one of them speaks.)

Ray: (reading from a card)

Welcome to the regular weekly meeting of The Open Circle. We believe there is a loving spirit in the universe, a loving spirit in this circle, and a loving spirit in each of us. We meet to recognize that spirit and to honor how it appears in our lives. There's no restriction on what can be said in this circle, as long as it expresses no intention to harm, control, or diminish anyone else.

Who'd like to start? Oh, first, my name is Ray, and I'm alive. Now, who'd like to start?

Margaret: I would. My name is Margaret, and I am alive. (she laughs) It feels good to say that. My name is Margaret, and I am alive. I never would have guessed how good that feels. I'm really glad to be here.

This always feels like the "Come as you are and be yourself" club. Even when I don't have anything to say, I feel good listening. But, tonight, I want to say something.

The other day I had an experience I don't get very often. Sometimes, it happens. I don't know when or how. I was sitting in my blue chair at home, and for no reason I can think of, all of a sudden, I felt really wonderful.

I wish I could feel like that all the time, but I don't, even if I want to. But, when I do, it's amazing.

I was just sitting there. I don't remember why I sat down, but I sat down. I stopped running around for a second, and I got the feeling I was in the middle of a really wonderful life.

I was IN my life and I was FEELING it, and at the same time, I was able to feel like I had just stepped into it, like I had just stepped into the room from somewhere else.

I looked around the room. I mean I really did. I sat on my favorite blue chair, and I looked around my room, and I saw EVERYTHING, as if I was a visitor in a room that I really liked.

And, and this is the real surprise, I felt that way about my body and my life, too, not just my room. I felt like I just stepped into my body from somewhere else. I got to feel what it's like to be IN my life.

It was like I was getting on a ride at Disney World, and the car, or whatever, didn't move for a minute, and I got to sit and feel how happy I was to be going on the ride, how happy I was to be at Disney World, how happy I was to be in Florida.

I mean how happy I was to be living my life. With my husband and my kids and my friends and my house and even with my body, which I don't always feel GREAT about, and I complain about it, but not that time.

I was sitting there, and I just felt great. I took a deep breath, and I got a kick out of that, too.

It's the feeling I get sometimes when I come in here, but it wasn't in here. I was at home, in the middle of the afternoon, in my living room.

It really was my LIVING ROOM. If one room is the living room, what are the other rooms for?

When those LITTLE MOMENTS come up, it's like a gift from out of nowhere, and I want to say how grateful I am that things like that happen, even if they don't happen all the time or even when I want them to.

Anyway, thanks.

Ray: Thanks, Margaret. Would anyone else like to talk?

Andy: Yeah, I would. My name is Andy, and I wish I could feel what Margaret is talking about, but I don't. I don't feel like that at all.

I know what this is about. It's.... Oh, did I say my name? My name is Andy, and I'm alive. Barely. Ha! Oh, shit, that's not true. I'm alive, but I don't feel so good about it, right now.

Well, I do. Dammit, I feel better already. I hate this Open Circle. Everytime I feel rotten, I come in the circle, and I feel better, in spite of the fact that I feel rotten.

Well, I do. Anyway. Feel rotten. But at least I feel better about feeling rotten, so that's a step in the right direction.

(He takes a deep breath and pauses.)

Here's the deal. I don't know what I'm doing. I've been acting like an idiot, and my muscles are getting tight, in different parts of my body, and I'm hyperventilating, and I try to sit still and meditate, and shit....

I can't even sit still, and so I had to talk first, but Margaret beat me to it, but, of course, everything she said was exactly where I'm not at, and I wish I was. OK. So.

(He pauses and takes a deep breath.)

I don't know what I'm doing, and the hard part of that is that I DO know what I'm doing. I'm trying too hard to figure out what I'm doing, that's what I'm doing.

(He laughs.)

Well, at least this is fun. Oh, wait a minute. I'm not having fun. Well, I mean I am sort of, right now, but I haven't been, lately. Having any fun.

And, what's fun? It isn't any one thing. Although, I could name some things I THINK are fun. But they aren't fun, if I don't have any fun doing them, so that's pointless.

(He pauses and sighs.)

Except for sex. No, not even sex. I don't always have fun at that, either. I wish I did. I could use some fun in sex.

Whenever my wife says she wants to have some fun, she means sex. But I've been pretty *non-fun-oriented*, lately.

Wait a minute. I get it. I wish she wouldn't say *fun* for sex. It's like it's got to be fun, or it's not OK. Jeez-uz, why don't I just have fun, if that's what she wants and it's what I want, too?

Oh, wait a minute. She came up to me and she said, "Let's have some fun." Only I wasn't thinking about fun. I was thinking about being buried under a huge pile of rocks. Boulders. I was hoping someone would come along and help me get out from under the rocks.

(A light bulb goes off in his mind.)

I was lying down after work, and I was tired, and I was sort of dreaming. And I was dreaming about being buried under all those big rocks, and my wife comes up.

She comes over to me on the couch, and she whispers in my ear, "Let's have some fun." Only all I wanted was for someone to help me get the rocks off me.

(He laughs.)

Oh, shit. Get my rocks off. I was feeling guilty, because I was horny, and being horny is not the same as having fun. It's SERIOUS. Except, everytime we start to play, it's a lot more fun having sex.

Oh, man, I get it. Having fun is better than just getting my rocks off. And having fun IS getting the rocks off.

What I really want to do is to lighten up. Get my rocks off means to lighten up. But I don't want someone else to tell me to do it. I just want to do it. Sex or no sex. Oh, great. That's great. I was feeling heavy and I felt bad about it, and she says let's have fun, and I felt bad because I felt heavy. I felt heavy and she says let's have fun, but that's not the same as not feeling heavy. I should have just told her I was feeling buried, she could have got that. She gets me, fine. She could have helped me get the rocks off, she could have done that. I could have done that. This circle is great! Thanks. Thanks a lot.

I guess I'm alive, after all. Wow. (He says the wow softly, very relaxed.)

Ray: Thanks, Andy. Who's next?

(There's a long pause, while the group waits for someone to speak.)

Alice: I am. I'm next. My name is Alice, and I'm alive. But I'm scared. Me. I'M scared.

I work in real estate, and I was out yesterday. I was looking at houses. I was going from place to place, to see what the market is.

I need to see what's current in the market, and I went into a house that was empty. Or so I thought. There was no one there. It was a nice house, the kind that's easy to sell.

I'm a single woman. I've never been afraid. I have to spend a lot of time meeting with strangers in all kinds of situations.

I've never been scared. I've been in situations that should have scared me to death. But they didn't. I've never been scared.

(Her body shakes, quickly, abruptly.)

I'm sorry. I didn't know what was going to happen if I started to talk.

(She composes herself.)

I was in the kitchen of this empty house, and I turned to open the basement door. I had the feeling there was a rec-room on the lower level.

It wasn't a basement. I'm sorry. I didn't mean basement. It was a surface level house. That's not important.

(She thinks about the door.)

I put my hand on the door to the basement, and my hand wouldn't go. I looked at the door, and I was scared to open it.

I don't know what I was afraid of. I was afraid to open it. I was afraid of the whole house. It was empty. I was scared, and I wanted to run out the door. I wanted to run over to my friend Ginny's house. Oh, I'm sorry.

(She starts to cry.)

Look, I'm sorry. I'm not a crier. I know it's good to cry. I always love people who can cry, but I'm not a crier. I'm not a good crier, anyway. I cry like an idiot. I'm so jerky when I cry. I cry like a little kid who's faking it. My mother always said that. She said I was faking it.

I could cry at Ginny's house. She's my friend. I don't mean she IS my friend. I mean we were friends when we were in grade school.

Don't you see? I was in that kitchen, and I reached for the door to the basement, and I got scared. I'm 34 years old. I'm a professional. I don't get scared by BASEMENTS.

I don't get scared. I disarmed a man with a gun, and I didn't even get scared then.

I'm sorry. I ...

(She becomes angry.)

This isn't some damn therapy session. This isn't some therapist's office. I hate this. I don't know what this is all about.

My friend told me about this group, and I just thought it would be fun, that's all. I don't want to unload on all of you. My friend told me that this is like a camp meeting.

She said it's like there's a big fire in the middle of the circle, and you can bring stuff in here and toss it in the fire, and the fire is warm, and the fire is the spirit of the group.

That's fine. I'm fine. I was JUST FINE. Then I decided to come to this meeting with my friend. And then I got scared in that house. Then my friend couldn't come tonight, so I came anyway, and this isn't what I thought, AT ALL.

(She looks around and senses no hostility.)

This is so weird. I haven't thought about this in years. Ginny and I went into Mr. Teale's house, one day, when we were ten.

His wife died. She was buried in the basement. That's what Darren Sanderson said. We took a vow, Ginny and me, that we would go and see if her grave was in Mr. Teale's basement.

We got to the basement door, and we heard a noise. It was Mr. Teale. He was coming to get us. We ran out the back door, really, really scared. I thought he was going to kill us and bury us with my mother.

(She cries.)

My mother ...

I miss my mom. When I was 14, she married a different guy than my dad, and I hated her.

I didn't cry when my parents got a divorce. I wished she was dead.

(she laughs)

God, this is so weird. It's too weird. I didn't think I'd end up talking about my mother. If I told my mother I missed her, I bet she'd say I was faking.

I don't care anymore. I know I'm not faking.

(She laughs, then feels sad.)

I just miss her. That's all.

I wonder what ever happened to Mrs. Teale. Maybe somebody knows. I don't know. Maybe, she just died.

I'm glad I came here tonight. I think. I thought for sure I was going to go crazy and give up the business. I guess I won't.

That's all from me. I think I'm done. Thanks.

Ray: Thanks, Alice. I'm glad you came. That's how it works.

Kate, you look like you're about to bust.

(Kate jumps up and speaks. She begins to move around awkwardly, at first, but increasingly like a dancer.)

Kate: I have to move. I can't sit still. I think I'm having panic attacks. I got a headache. Like an ice cream headache. I can't sit still. I have to move around. It works for me. I have to be physical. I don't know how to express myself, unless I'm physical. I can't sit still for very long.

My name is Kate, and I'm too alive. I have too much energy. I can't stand it sometimes.

I saw a graffiti the other day. It said, "If you can't be God, be graceful." Under that, somebody else wrote, "Yeah, and if you can't be graceful, take your shit out on everyone else."

See? That's what happens to me. I take a big block of stone, and I whack on it, and after a while, this thing happens, and it gets graceful, and then it's like a dance, and the stone is my partner.

Something graceful comes out of all that hammering. I have to start with something that's too big to handle, and it becomes something delicate and graceful.

I can't be God. God is already graceful. I'm not God. I'm not graceful at all.

But I can get there, sometimes. I've got all this energy, and I have to use it up, until the other thing happens. I used to think I was crazy. I still am crazy. I'm going nuts. My brain is busting out.

(All this is accompanied by arm and hand movement, like interpretive dancing.)

My problem is; I don't know how to get along in this world.

(Her energy changes.)

A friend of mine asked me, once, if I thought there were people who are too sensitive to live in this world, and I thought, "Yeah. Everybody!"

Actually, I thought she was talking about me, but she wasn't. She was talking about this guy she knew who lived in a sanitarium, because he couldn't handle it in the world. That sounds about right for me. I need that. I need that, real bad, right now.

See, also, I like that other line about if you can't be graceful, dump your shit on everybody else. So I'm dumping it in the fire that she talked about. My brain is a big slab of granite, right now, and I got a ice cream headache, like there's a chisel in a crack in my brain, and some guy is whacking away on it with a mallet. I'm a sculptor, but sometimes I feel like I'm the granite. I'm the whackER, but sometimes I feel like the whackEE.

If God is the sculptor ... and I believe that ... I do ... well, then, it's going to be OK, but I feel sorry for the fucking granite, if it feels like me, right now.

I think my problem is that I'm BROKE. I've got enough materials for what I'm doing RIGHT NOW, TODAY, like it's my DAILY BREAD, and that should be ENOUGH for me, but my motorcycle was stolen, yesterday, and some guy, the guy who stole it, couldn't get it started, so he got pissed off at it and started wailing on it and messed it up good.

There's a great piece of art for you. This idiot, in a park near my house, at five o'clock in the morning, wailing away on my bike, because he couldn't get it started.

It's a cosmic joke. Me. I'm a cosmic joke. I can't get it started. I keep making these unbelievably, fucking beautiful, graceful dancers out of granite, and I'm broke as a thief. My life is a total failure. Sort of.

When I'm working, I mean sculpting, I don't feel like that. When I stop sculpting, I feel good. When I start, I feel good. When I'm doing it, I feel good. But I can't seem to make a living. I can't ...

I say to myself, "Well, so what? You're doing what you love, aren't you?" Yeah, I am. "You get to make things and you get to feel the spirit, and you like it, right? Yeah, so be happy. What d'you want out of this life, huh?"

I'm a lucky dog. Yeah, I'm a lucky, lucky dog. But I want to be a regular success for a WHILE, anyway, just to FIND OUT what's it like.

I want to be a normal success, just for the experience. I want to know what it's like to be a normal person, but I CAN'T QUIT DOING WHAT I'M DOING.

(She sits down, as if resigned.)

Normal life is just like a stolen motorcycle. That's how I feel. I can't get the bastard going. I don't have the key. And it's not MY motorcycle anyway. I stole it. It belongs to someone else.

(She gets up again, more graceful, this time.)

All you can do is do what you do. I'm a sculptor, and that's it. I can't do all that other shit. I wish I could. I never could figure it out.

I see all you people going to work everyday, and I wish I could do that. I wish I could just get a regular job and put in my time and get me one of those beautiful PAY CHECKS. Oh well, I guess somebody else wishes they could cut granite.

It isn't just me that's sensitive. It's the stone. You got to be real gentle with stone. You have to coax it and talk to it and be real nice to it. You got to take care of it.

Stone is like a baby. You can't be rough with it. You have to nurture it and love it. You got to treat it with respect. You have to ask it if it wants to play with you.

If you don't ask, it comes apart like dropping crystal. Granite is just like crystal. You have to be real gentle with it. It starts crying like some kid you been mean to. You can't make it do something it doesn't want to do.

(She sits, very calmly, gently.) Thanks for listening. I feel better. I got to be nice to my brain. My brain gets all upset, like a little kid who's lost, and she's at the police station. All alone and lost.

Maybe I'll take my brain out for an ice cream cone, after the meeting, not to eat it fast, to eat it real slow. I get going too fast, sometimes.

It feels good to sit still for a while. I don't suppose anybody understands anything I'm talking about. But I feel better. Thanks for letting me shoot my mouth off.

You know, there's a really neat sound that happens when you take all your cutting tools and drop them on a piece of marble. It sounds like silverware you drop in the sink. Anyway, I probably sounded like that. Anyway, thanks.

Elpa: (She speaks slowly, softly, gently.) I would like to talk. I'm not a talker. I'm not a mover-arounder, like Kate is.

I don't have much to say. Not very much has happened to me that I could tell stories about.

I like it when things are quiet.

I don't think I have any problems to talk about. I'm pretty happy. The things that make me happy are small ones.

I like to be quiet most of the time. Things happen, but not big things.

Well, for example, yesterday, I was walking on my street, and a rubber ball rolled out of some berry bushes, and I picked it up.

(She thinks about it.)

It had the word SESAME written on it. Now, isn't that something? SESAME, like the seed, like OPEN SESAME.

I squeezed the ball. It was red and yellow, a rubber ball. I squeezed it, and I said thank you.

I say thank you, whenever I get a feeling like what Margaret was speaking about. Not thank you for the ball, but thank you for the feeling I had when I was there.

After a while, I put the ball down on the grass. I don't know whose ball it was. It was only a rubber ball. I don't know why it rolled out of the bushes.

I held it for a little while, and then I put it down on the grass by the sidewalk.

It was red and yellow, and the grass was green. It stayed on the grass where I put it. I thought it would be easier to find, if someone was looking for it.

It was the kind of thing, that happens to me, that I like. I like to walk in my neighborhood.

No one bothers me. It would be very hard to bother me. I don't get bothered very easily. You'd have to run over me with a truck to get me bothered by anything.

It's always been like this. It's the way I am. I don't mind a bit. I think people who are different from me are very interesting, but I never wish I was like them.

I hear what I hear, and I see what I see, and the rest doesn't bother me. I'm pretty invisible most of the time, I suppose.

When you're invisible, like I am, you get to meet all the other invisibles, the ones that most people don't even see. Like that rubber ball.

Oh, my name is Elpa. Isn't that a funny name? I have to say that I love my name. I feel alive to have a name like Elpa.

Thank you very much. This meeting is a good place to meet invisible parts of people. I like it here.

Ray: Thanks, Elpa. You never know when a rubber ball's going to roll out of the bushes. Who else would like to talk?

Darrell: My name is Darrell, and I am alive. There was a time when there was some doubt about that. I barely survived the war. I came home a patchwork job for the VA. That's another story. I've been listening to everyone, but I didn't think I'd want to talk.

I didn't think I'd ever do a lot of things. I didn't think I'd ever walk again, and this weekend I'm going to run in a marathon. I may not finish it, but I've done a couple of 10K's, so 26 miles doesn't seem too ridiculous.

I say that, because everyday I'm not dead is a miracle to me. I should have been dead. Well, I say I should have been dead, but since I'm not in charge,

I can't even say that.

I'm talking around the subject. I was listening to Elpa. Is that right? Elpa? And I was listening. It's funny what it takes to trigger a memory.

I was reading a story in the Sunday paper, one time. The writer described the sound his refrigerator door made when it slammed shut. I had a refrigerator just like the one the writer had, and when he described the sound of the door slamming shut, I didn't think about my refrigerator.

I thought about the deck guns on a gunboat in the delta. Ka-whump. It sent chills through my body when I read about that guy's refrigerator. I must have slammed that door a thousand times, and I never thought about those guns.

Regardless, I was listening to Elpa's story about the rubber ball, and it brought back a memory. I hope nobody's squeamish about war stories. Usually, I don't tell war stories. Even in my drinking days, right after the war, I didn't like to talk about it.

It was part of my recovery to talk about it, and I'm glad I learned to do that. My life's good, now. I don't remember the war the same way I used to.

I'm getting to it. I was listening to Elpa's story about the rubber ball, and I wasn't thinking about anything in particular. Then, there I was.

I was standing in a clearing. It was bright sun. I heard a helicopter not too far off. There was an explosion, and then there was silence. I was alone.

The rest of the platoon was scattered.

It was a beautiful day. The helicopter should have been OK. We didn't think there was enemy in range. Maybe it was one guy with a rocket launcher. Maybe it was a fluke. Maybe the helicopter had a malfunction and blew itself up. It happens. Anything could happen. You never knew. I don't know. I'll never know.

Damn helicopter seemed to disintegrate. Most of it fell away from me. None of it fell near me. Except for one thing. I was looking up at the sky, almost directly into the sun. I shaded my eyes, and I thought about taking cover. But I didn't.

I was 19. I was one tough motherfucker. Sorry. I acted like I was one tough Marine. I acted like I was John Wayne's daddy. Nowadays, you'd say Rambo, I suppose. I thought I could eat bullets and shit grenades. Sorry. I get carried away with my language.

Anyway, I was standing there in a clearing, like a meadow, and I heard an explosion, and I looked up, and it happened away from me, like a fireworks show. And then, out of nowhere, like her rubber ball, a piece of something fell out of the sky and landed in front of me.

It was a hand, a human hand, and it landed almost right at my feet. It was severed at the wrist, and it looked alive. It didn't move or anything. It didn't twitch or wave. I don't mean anything like that. It wasn't a joke. It wasn't a movie.

I didn't look at it and think about the guy who died. I didn't think about anything. I went back to being a Marine. But, for a second, I was staring at something my mind couldn't make sense of. It was like it was from another planet. It was a hand. A hand fell out of the sky.

I haven't thought about that in 20 years. It didn't come up in my therapy. Not once. I think my mind dismissed it, as soon as it happened.

I wasn't supposed to be there, doing what I was doing. I thought I was. I tried very hard to believe what I was doing had MEANING and PURPOSE and VALUE.

In order to live in an insane world, you have to work too damn hard. It's just not natural to be insane.

For a second, the insanity was pointing its finger at me, and I saw it.

Unbelievable. I haven't thought about that incident in years. I saw so much worse. I'm glad I did think about it, though.

Elpa's right about being quiet and moving slow. I was taught that in the service, in the war. It works even better in the NOT-WAR.

I'm still alive, and I'm glad to be here. Thanks.

Ray: Thanks, Darrell. I want to say something. I don't like to talk about spirituality, because I don't usually feel it when I'm talking about it. It's something I want and I'm grateful for, but I feel like a plant that doesn't understand photosynthesis. But I like the sunlight. Sometimes the sun shines and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes I have to stretch real hard to find it, and other times, I bask in it. But I'm sure not the one to figure it out.

I knew a guy once who said we were all exactly the same when it came to God. That makes sense to me. I come to these meetings, to see how we're all the same, even though we're all different.

I'm the secretary of this meeting for another week. I recommend it. Next week, we pick a new secretary, so be think about it.

We'll put out the basket for rent and coffee. Give what you can, or don't. We'll continue this meeting only as long as we want to continue.

Who wants to continue? We still have lots of time.

Mary Lynn: I can't handle this anymore. I'm pissed. It's nothing anyone has said. It just isn't me. When, uh ... is it Kate? ... when Kate said, "If you can't be God, be graceful," I thought she said "grateful." If you can't be God, be grateful. Well, I am. I'm grateful I'm not God.

I've been coming to these meetings for a while, and there's something I need to say. My name is Mary Lynn, and I'm alive. That means something to me, and I'm not sure it means the same thing to you all, and I need to talk about it. If I don't, I may not be able to keep coming.

I like it here. It feels good to me to come here and talk and listen. I never know what's going to happen. But I'm not sure we're getting the whole picture. Being alive means a lot of different things. What about the dark side? What about anger, hatred, power, and all that? I have moments of aliveness that have nothing to do with serenity and goodness.

I've been trying to deal with this for a long time. I don't believe it's good to be filled with rage or hatred or anger, but GODDAM IT, it feels good when I get angry. It makes me feel GOOD. But I don't want to hurt anyone. Hurting someone else is only going to make me hurt.

What I'm trying to say is that when I recognize my own rage, or whatever, I start to feel better. It doesn't feel better to stay angry, but it feels better to KNOW I'm angry.

I like masks. I use masks. Animal masks. That's what I do. I have a mask of a bear, with its teeth showing, and I put it on. And I have a drum. I dance and yell and roar. It's better than taking a bath or eating ice cream. I don't even have to know what I'm angry about. I don't really think bears get angry. They just growl and roar, because that's what bears do.

Bears don't roar at their mates or their children because they had a bad day down at the stream. That's what I mean by the dark side. It's a fact of nature. It doesn't mean going out and ripping someone's head off. That's like Kate's graffiti about taking your shit out on someone else. That's the dark side when you don't pay any attention to it, when you let it run you.

I'm not God, and I'm grateful. I'm a human being, and human beings are not God. We're like bears. We have graceful moments, and we have a nasty side, too. I always feel good when I act like a bear. I come home to my apartment, after a lousy day at the stream, and I close the door and I turn on the water in

the shower. I don't know why. I like it. I like to think it muffles the sound. I get my mask and I roar.

Oh, first, I sit down. No, first, I get rid of my work clothes, and I talk to the bear mask. It's not like talking to a teddy bear. This bear has teeth and claws. The bear is my friend, my ally. I say what I want about the day, and then I start to breath deep.

I forgot that, for a second. I start breathing deep, and then I like snort. It's like huffing and puffing, but more powerful. Eventually, I roar. Really roar. I surprise myself. That's probably what's so cool about it. And all that roaring doesn't make me feel worse, it makes me feel better. Like a teddy bear.

I can't believe I'm telling you all this. But I had to. It's important to me. I'm starting to see how this isn't any different than anything else I've ever wanted to say in here. It's good. It's great! And, it's not sexual. It's not. Well, it is. It can get pretty sexual. That's up to the individual, of course. Unless you're not alone. There's an idea.

I thought I was going to explode. Good. I feel good. Thanks.

Stan: My name is Stan. Mary Lynn said that about having to say something she was afraid to say. Me, too.

I am alive, but I feel like I don't CARE, anymore. I care about being alive, but I don't CARE. I listen and I appreciate what I hear, but I don't CARE.

It seems like the more faith I have in God, the less faith I have in people. I think that's good, in the long run.

Years ago, when I was a drunk, I thought I was going to end up on a rock in the middle of the desert, screaming at God. Then I realized the feeling I had at the end of my drinking was the same feeling I had as a baby.

I came into the world alone and crying out, and I would have gone out the same way, but I began to TALK to God instead of scream at him, and I began to believe he cared for me, and I began to feel the spirit take away the emptiness. My desert became green, but now I feel like an oasis in the middle of the same desert.

I thought I was part of a great human pageant, and I thought I was cared for and supported, or would be, if only I did the best I could.

I thought my love was sufficient. I thought MY love would make all things possible, but it didn't, and it hasn't. I feel like I was romantically dependent on the world and everybody in it.

This is hard to say. I'm not complaining. I had a wonderful time in my romanticism. I had a lot of company. The world is full of romantics who want to play that game, too. And, I was good at it. But, my romanticism fell apart.

I was thinking WE were God. I wasn't asking God to be God.

Since I've begun to rely on God, I've felt disillusioned. I wanted to think of people as angels of the spirit. That's a little extreme. I want to believe that the spirit works through people, but I think people always screw it up, in some way. I know I'm wrong, but that's the way I feel.

My heart HURTS. I don't think I can trust anyone anymore.

The world looks like a mess to me. I see a bunch of sweet, helpless children, and a whole lot of partially destroyed children, and everybody depending on each other, never knowing, from one minute to the next, what to do or how to do it.

And I don't care. I can't help anybody who doesn't want help. And the people who want help, need God, not me. I'm going to end up on my rock in the desert, after all. Right now, I don't have any heart for anyone, not even for myself. I feel HEARTBROKEN.

But I'm telling you, there's something I don't get.

I was in love with you, with all of you, and today, I'm not. I love God today, but I'm not IN LOVE with God, either. I wish I was in love with something.

But being in love FEELS sick. It feels like I'm expecting somebody ELSE to fulfill MY life, and nobody can do that.

All my life, I tried to find out what the world wanted me to do, and then I tried to do it, because I was in love with the world, but the love affair is OVER. I just don't know what happens next.

That's where I am. I don't know if what I'm saying is good for anyone else, but everything that's happened to me, so far, has led to something better.

I hope this is the same. Maybe I just haven't given this enough of a chance. I'm still new at this. I just don't know how to trust.

Thanks for letting me talk.

Vanos: My name is Vanos, and I am alive, and for this I am grateful. I have not come to this meeting before, but I am very much glad to come to this meeting.

If you will forgive me the way I am not speaking so good, I would like to say a little. The most miraculous thing I am hearing is the way we are always coming to be alive.

When I was quite young man, I too was much in love with this world, and not so long after that, I despise this world. For me to say I have hate for the world and everyone in it is to say only a little part of how I am angry, at that time.

One day, after many, many years, and it was many years ago, it was like a miracle, also. The hatefulness in me, it stop. And, you know, I was not once again in love with the world. I was not in love, and I was not in such hate.

I was also not like many people who have no feelings. They are the saddest ones, because they have died and still they are living. But they are not alive. To be alive is to be feeling. To be feeling nothing is to no longer be alive.

And there are people who are doing everything to stop their feelings and put their feelings to sleep. This is also sad for so many who are afraid to be alive. It is also not easy to be alive. I think there was a time when it was not so hard to be alive and to be feeling everything in your life, but it was a very long time ago.

And still I am glad to see many people who are being alive and coming to this meeting and to say, "I am alive." It is good thing to say. It is good for people to tell each other what is happening in their lives. I am listening, and my heart is filling up with these stories I am hearing.

I must tell you than when I stop hating this world, I start then to love only those things that my heart loves best. To be in love with the world is to try to think that everything is good. This is crazy.

When I was young man, I was in love with young woman of my town. I love everything about her. This is also crazy. She was not so perfect that I should not tell her one part from the other. I was in love with her shoes as good as I was in love with her beautiful eyes. If she wore blue, then I was in love with that color blue. When she was reading book, I was in love with author of that book.

It is a strong feeling to be in love, because it is like I am being a hypnotism. But I must wake up. When I am in love, there is no room for me to find out what I am feeling. If I am feeling only one thing all the time, then I feel nothing.

And I can not know this woman. How can I know her if I am feeling the same all of the time. Is SHE the SAME all of the time? She is NOT the same all of the time.

So I was also in love with the world. And then terrible things happen. My love is turn to hate. Then one day, the hating stop. Then, I am afraid. I have two feelings only in my life. First, love, and then, hate. What am I going to feel now? I have no experience. I am like baby.

Aha, you see? There is the answer. I am a baby, and I must learn ALL of the feelings. I must learn what I am for sure feeling. And I must learn what the world is. This makes me to start all over at the beginning. But it is no good. There is much to love in the world. But not to be in love with. The world is not a good lover. It is good not to be a lover to the world. But to love. This is good.

To be alive is to see the things of love. When I am looking at my wife, I see her as she is, that woman, Elpa. Sometime, I am the one who is rolling the ball from the bushes. But I am not saying. I am not always the one.

She is not needing me to show her the joy in my heart. And I am not needing her to make me the joy in her heart. In this, we are good friend, and we are finding much love. I am saying only for myself. She is one who talks for her.

Thanks to you for listening to my words. I am not so good to change old ways, but my heart does not speak so funny as I do. God bless you.

Ray: Is there anyone here I can call on who doesn't want to talk? Anybody who might talk, if I called on them? How about Bill? You mind, Bill? You want to talk?

Bill: (Bill is suppressed energy. He rapidly becomes more and more animated.) Thanks a lot, Raymond. You know how to pick 'em. I feel like Stan. Something Stan was saying. I'm stuck in the muck. The great human

muck. My life as soap opera. I listen to everyone having their lives, being alive, and I think, "Yeah, I know about that." But I'm stuck. I don't want to give up my drama, but the theatre's closed. I come here, and I miss my tragedy.

I used to be gloriously miserable. The world was miserable. I was GLORIOUSLY miserable. I wanted the prize. I wanted to be the MOST miserable, and I wanted THE BIG PAYOFF. You know what that is? That's BIG THRILLS ... THE RUSH. When my life was EXTREME in EVERY way, SO was EVERYthing in it. TRAUMA DRAMA. God, I loved it. I loved it, and I miss it.

I WANT SOME TERRORIST TO BUST IN HERE AND TAKE US ALL HOSTAGE AND THREATEN THE WOMEN, and then I could be a HERO, or a COWARD, and I could grab some GLORY or DIE LIKE A RAT.

There's NOTHING WRONG with my life. THAT'S DISGUSTING. I KNOW how to be alive, and I still wish I was a RAGING IDIOT. I liked it in the old days when I could GET CRAZY or some OTHER crazy guy would TERRORIZE ME.

I KNOW that's still just bad drama, BUT I MISS IT. I STILL WANT CHEAP THRILLS AND BAD DRAMA. GOD, I MISS IT.

IT'S EASY TO LIVE IN THE MOMENT, WHEN THE MOMENT IS BEING TERRORIZED.

I know the OPPOSITE of fear is FAITH, but I ran my life on FEAR, and without it, I feel like SOMEONE TOOK MY TOYS, AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO PLAY WITHOUT THEM.

OK, so I'd rather take POSITIVE RISKS instead of NEGATIVE RISKS. Instead of FLIPPIN' THE BONE at a COP, I'd rather do what I really want. It's MORE EXCITING, and there's no BAD REPERCUSSIONS.

But there ARE repercussions! I HAVE TO CHANGE MY LIFE!

DAMN! THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH EXCITEMENT I CAN HANDLE.

It was MUCH easier when my life was NORMALLY insane. It's like I'm running from the bloodhounds, and all of a sudden, I discover I CAN FLY. It's scary up here without a pilot's license. GIVE ME BACK THE DAMN DOGS! At least I KNEW THEM. They were PREDICTABLE.

So, I get fucked out. I can't go BACK to the good old days. The truth is, the good old days SUCKED. Otherwise, I wouldn't have LEFT THEM in the FIRST PLACE.

YOU know what I'm saying. We come in here, and we talk about being alive. GIVE ME A FUCKING BREAK. WHY DON'T WE TALK ABOUT WALKING TO MARS, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE.

I've been waiting for SOMEONE to talk about how HARD this is. TO BE ALIVE EVERY MOMENT? EVERY DAMN MOMENT? I'M LUCKY IF I CAN BE ALIVE ONE MOMENT AT A TIME.

HEY! PUT THAT UP ON THE WALL. "ONE MOMENT AT A TIME."

I'm getting myself excited. WHY? SO I CAN BE ALIVE? I know, I know. I AM alive. My name is Bill, and I am alive. I AM. RIGHT THIS VERY MINUTE, I'M ALIVE, and that's all I have.

I think about being alive FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE, and I'm talking eighty or ninety more years, I'M OUT OF MY MIND!

I liked it better when I was either asleep or having a BAD DREAM, but being ALIVE is being AWAKE. I didn't just WAKE UP and now I'm awake for the rest of my life. I FELL awake, and now I have to STAY awake.

I don't REALLY want to go back to sleep. Not REALLY. I JUST MISS IT. As long as I was HALF-ASLEEP, I could DREAM about waking up. But if I WAKE UP ALL THE WAY, THEN WHAT?

(He pauses, takes a deep breath, and lets it out.)

Thanks. I needed to see how SCARED I get. I always want to GO BACK TO THE PAST when I'm scared of the future. So, FUCK THE FUTURE.

NO, I DON'T MEAN fuck the future. I mean fuck worrying about it. I'm RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW, and I'm fine. I'M ALIVE.

Ray: OK, who's next? Peter?

Peter: Thanks, Ray. I'm Peter, and I'm alive.

I'm glad I'm alive. I'm even grateful. I'm grateful like I never thought I would be. I don't have any words for it. There's a feeling called gratitude, and now I know what that feeling is.

I always thought words like serenity, humility, gratitude, words like that, were interesting concepts.

I thought the ancient Greeks, or somebody, sat around and dreamed up words, and then people tried to act like what they were talking about, like being an actor. I used to sit under a tree, next to a stream, on a beautiful day, and pretend I was peaceful. I was good, too. I could pretend so well, if you took a picture of me under the tree, it'd look like I belonged there.

A picture is worth a thousand words, but a thousand words is still just a picture.

(He looks around, inhales and exhales softly.)

I like this room. I learned how to feel peaceful in here.

One of the gifts of this group is ... I don't have to respond to anyone. That just knocks me out. It took me a while to understand that. I was so used to smiling and PRETENDING to listen, and making up things to say, I never learned how to listen.

Then I came here, and I stopped TRYING to listen. I stopped trying to listen to you, and I ACCIDENTALLY heard me.

I heard my real self talking. I found out my real self was there all the time. I was so busy trying to imitate him, I didn't notice he was there, already.

I started to FEEL things, and then I got it. The ancient people, who first made up words, were actually FEELING things, and THEN they made up words to describe the feelings. I thought it was the other way around.

I finally understood that human beings are extremely sensitive to feelings, and all the languages came later.

I said to myself, "If some guy made up the word "serene," to describe what he was feeling, then I can do that, too."

I thought, "If I'm a human being and I'm alive, then I must be able to feel everything that every human being was able to feel.

And I don't even have to know the names of the feelings.

It's like flowers. I can look at them, and I can smell them, and I can touch them, I can even eat them, and I don't have to know their names to do it.

Of course, what happens, once you start smelling the flowers, after awhile, you start learning their names, because they've become like friends, and I like to know the names of my friends.

After I could recognize my own feelings, I could recognize the same things happening to you. I could sit here, in this room, or some room like it, any

room at all, I could watch and listen, I could hear what you were talking about, and it started to blow my mind.

I could sit here, and pay no attention, and have a hell of a good time. I could sit here, with no expression on my face, no expectations, no ideas, no advice to give, and I could see that you had the same feelings I had.

Once I had a taste of this, there's no way I was going to live without it. So as long as you want to come here, so do I.

Ray: Thanks, Peter. We're about out of time. Anybody have any closing thoughts?

Rosie: I do. I think. Oh, I'm Rosie, and I'm alive. And I think this is the weirdest group of people I've ever been in. I've never heard anything like this, before. That's all. Thanks. I actually had fun.

Ray: Thanks for those encouraging words, Rosie. Time's up. The donation basket is by the door. Thanks for helping to clean up.

When we close, first, someone says a prayer of their choice. Then that person sings a note, or a tone, and holds it. Then, we all pick a tone of our own and join in. Nobody's out of tune, and nobody's off key.

Thank you all for coming. Marylynn, would you like to lead us?

(The group stands and forms a circle, holding hands.)

Mary Lynn: Sure, Ray. Thanks.

Great Spirit, thank you for the love in the world, thank you for the love in this circle, and thank you for the love in my heart.

(After the prayer, there is a moment of silence. Mary Lynn begins and holds a note. Others follow, until everyone is singing together. The sound rises and stays, then falls to silence. The lights come down as the sound comes down.)

The End